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Entidhar Hamzah Abbas Al-Rashid

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**THE REPRESENTATION OF THE IRAQI WAR, MIDDLE EASTERN
CULTURE, AND WOMEN IN BENJAMIN BUCHHOLZ'S
*ONE HUNDRED AND ONE NIGHTS***

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, English

By

Entidhar Al-Rashid

May 2016

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English

Missouri State University, May 2016

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ABSTRACT

The Iraqi war not only affected Iraqi culture but also had a significant impact on a historically marginalized member of Iraqi society, namely, women. The American novelist Benjamin Buchholz explored the life of Iraqis from a unique perspective after his 2003 deployment. Instead of writing from the perspective of an American soldier, he gave an Iraqi perspective on the effect of the US-led invasion on Iraqi culture through the eyes of his two main protagonists, Abu Saheeh and Layla. In his novel, *One Hundred and One Nights*, Buchholz addresses the effect of war on Iraqi culture generally and Middle Eastern women particularly, focusing on the lives of Iraqis living in the southern city of Safwan. Buchholz views Middle Eastern culture and women as susceptible to influences by American culture, as a result of the US-led invasion. Using the interpretive methods of feminism and post-colonialism as outlined by Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, this thesis explores Buchholz's depiction the drastic changes to the conservative culture of Iraq, and especially to its women, as a result of the American occupation. In its conclusion, this thesis suggests that war and postwar occupation affects the culture of other people, which leads to culture collision in some respects and to cultural interchange in other respects.

KEYWORDS: Iraqi invasion, feminism, post-colonialism, culture, Middle Eastern women, Benjamin Buchholz, Literature

This abstract is approved as to form and content

James S. Baumlín, PhD
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
Missouri State University

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Approved:

James S. Baumlin, PhD

Tita F. Baumlin, PhD

Lanya Lamouria, PhD

Julie Masterson, PhD: Dean, Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to The Higher Committee for Education Development in Iraq for creating the HCED scholarship program. I am grateful for the inspiration and wisdom of my dear Professors Dr. James Baumlin and Dr. Tita Baumlin, whose teaching, support and encouragement have inspired me to work diligently. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my advisor Dr. James Baumlin for his understanding, patience, advice, and help in structuring my thesis. His willingness to give his time so generously is very much appreciated. My special thanks to Dr. Matthew Calihman, the Director of Graduate Studies in English, for all his assistance and advice. I would also like to thank Dr. Lanya Lamouria for her Victorian literature class, which inspired me to write about fiction. And I give my grateful appreciation and respect to the late Dr. Jane Hoogestraat, who was originally a member of my thesis committee and helped ground my understanding of literary theory. Finally, my special thanks are extended to all my lovely friends who supported me to complete my thesis.

I dedicate this thesis to my family for their support and encouragement throughout my studies: to my siblings, Intsar, Fatima, Iman, and Hussein who are always there for me, and especially to my mother, whose love, prayers, and care helped me to achieve my dreams. I could not be where I am without your love and support. I love you all.

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INTRODUCTION

War is more than a military clash between countries, nations, or parties. Indeed, it is the destruction, annihilation, and displacement of a large number of innocents. Besides these obvious tangible effects, war traumatizes those who are affected by the horrific violence on both sides, the invaders as well as the invaded. Wars that are the result of imperial powers affect not only the lives of a people but also their culture and traditions. In an occupied or colonized country, one can see how people try to get acquainted with the new culture imposed by the colonizers, who bring with them different values, beliefs, traditions, and habits. (Throughout this thesis, terms like “occupation” and “colonization” will be used interchangeably, since their cultural impacts are largely the same.) This aspect of colonialization has existed for centuries among both colonized nations and invaders and continues to the present day. Indeed, the colonial countries continue to impact lives of many Eastern people today.

The colonized and the colonial countries do not share similar traditions or warfare. According to Zandra Kambysellis, war leads to an oppression that “takes the form of a mostly unconscious cultural assimilation—an unknowing indoctrination of the colonialists’ beliefs upon their colonized persons” (1). Furthermore, cultural exchange results from the interaction between the two peoples, the colonial countries and the colonized nations. At some point, the colonized people are affected by the values and traditions of the colonizer, which is often viewed as superior in its traditions. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha claims that “designations of identity [drive] the process of symbolic interaction, [serving as] the connective that constructs the differences

between upper and lower, black and white” (5). The colonized people may experience identity crisis that results from their interest in the new culture. Additionally, post-colonialism as a period describes an aftermath of colonization, where a culture continues to be affected by the imperial process; one must also note the unconscious effects the colonizer has upon a people by his mere presence (Kamysellis 1). Post-colonialism also touches on such issues as men’s and women’s societal roles, including the ideologies of feminism and feminist liberation. Indeed, feminism as a social movement seeks to advocate or support the rights and equality of women, since many societies have always considered women the weaker vessel and inferior in comparison to men. Feminist theory continues to support and to improve the status of women, and it also reviews all aspects of separate treatment for women as interrelated.

Many if not most people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism. And while every member of a society is affected by war, among the most vulnerable members are women who are trying to protect their families while being stuck in the warzone. As a result of the warfare in their homeland, women have lost their rights to have a prominent role in the society. As can be seen in the southern Iraqi city of Safwan, girls are discouraged from finishing their education and are often obliged into early marriage. After decades of abuse and violence under the reign of Saddam Hussein, most Iraqi women saw a glimmer of hope in the US invasion of 2003, and Iraqis everywhere thought of the invasion as a new era that would bring an end to oppression. Iraqi women hoped for a social change that would end or at least improve the domestic patriarchal system and remove class oppression. After all, Iraqi women have

experienced considerable brutality in their lives for decades as a result of war and the conservative society.

Benjamin Buchholz, in *One Hundred and One Nights*, displays Iraqi life during war, probes into the emotional costs and trauma on both civilians and soldiers, and explores cultural changes. Buchholz is able to represent the lives of the people who live in the southern Iraqi city of Safwan due to his familiarity with this specific area from his 2003 deployment to Iraq. However, his novel is not written from an American perspective; rather, it is told from the viewpoints of Abu Saheeh, an American-educated Iraqi doctor who is haunted by the war—and its second protagonist is Layla, a teenage Iraqi female who haunts the mentality of Abu Saheeh. Part of the novel shows the reader the interchange of cultures, the effect of the American invasion of Iraq, and the interaction between the occupying forces and the occupied people. The novel gives a clear picture of the traditions in post-colonial Iraq and of the conservative rules that are imposed on women.

As noted, this thesis discusses the image of Middle Eastern women and Iraqi culture in the post-war Iraqi society as displayed in *One Hundred and One Nights* by applying the post-colonialist theories of Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. It focuses on how Buchholz represents Middle Eastern women who have been affected by American culture. It also shows how Buchholz reveals the conservative society's views towards women by comparing American society to Iraqi society.

PART I: HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Chapter 1: Background about the United States' Invasion of Iraq

A'Ishah Waheed says 19 March 2003 marks one of the significant eras in the history of Iraq. The US invasion of Iraq—the so-called Second Gulf War—aimed to overthrow the brutal dictator Saddam Hussein and was justified largely due to Hussein's claims that he had weapons of mass destruction. It is significant that regime change in Iraq was pursued by neoconservatives during the presidency of George W. Bush. Previously, the United States had supported Saddam Hussein and provided arms for him during the Iran-Iraq conflict of 1980-88, even though the US government was aware of Saddam's oppression of the Iraqi people. The reason that the United States shifted its policy against Saddam was because he threatened to disrupt the world's oil supplies when he decided to occupy Kuwait in 1990. This made the United States rally support for an international coalition, with the help of the United Nations. But Hussein was left in power after the First Gulf War. The mission of the Second Gulf War was to disable the weapons of mass destruction, to remove Saddam as a leader, and to free the Iraqi people from a tyrannical period. George W. Bush, the son of George H. W. Bush, described Saddam as a dictator whose aim was to develop and hide weapons that would allow him to dominate the Middle East (Waheed).

Further, George W. Bush claimed that Saddam was responsible for the terrorist attacks of 9/11 because, he believed, Al-Qaeda had a connection with the Iraqi government. Indeed, the terrorist action against the United States by Osama bin Laden in September, 2001, led to a series of policy decisions taken by the US in order to impede

future attacks. But this policy has come with a hefty price: According to Vincent Cannistraro, “America’s efforts to shape the political evolution of Middle Eastern countries using both overt and covert means, the unilateral undertaking of warfare in the name of preempting future attack, and the waning of the democratic model of the United States to the world” (56) have made the world less secure.

The United States’ invasion of Iraq failed to find weapons of mass destruction; it also failed to provide security and redevelopment in Iraq after the defeat of Saddam Hussein. The ill-treatment of prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison and the problematic occupation had very bad consequences on the lives of Iraqi people. Jonathan Schell points out that:

There were the Iraqi death groups and torture squads allied with and advised by the United States—and, if current reports are right, directly sponsored by the United States. There was the surprising, protracted failure of the occupation to restore even basic services, such as electricity, water and sanitation. Above all, there were those who lost their lives for nothing—the more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians (3).

Notably, most Iraqi people thought that life would be better in coming years and the majority were happy that Saddam Hussein was gone. They hated to be occupied by another country, but they were hopeful that the US military occupation of Iraq would bring the foundation for open democracy and full sovereignty. However, people observed the opposite: increased violence, massive destruction, increased deaths, and the disappearance of security completely from the country (Levine 264). The situation in Iraq regarding security had become worse in each succeeding year and continues to deteriorate as a result of growing polarization in Iraqi society and frail governmental authority. Additionally, the Iraqi invasion, instead of decreasing the terrorist threat, has evolved into a greater terrorist threat, where many Jihadis from other countries have

infiltrated the border to kill not only civilians but also American forces. According to John Newsinger, “At the time, many people had pointed out that the invasion would create a terrorist problem where one did not already exist. This quickly proved to be the case, although no one foresaw the unprecedented scale that the phenomenon was to eventually assume with the rise of the Islamic State” (39).

The sudden increase of terrorist attacks after the invasion of Iraq could easily be seen in the deaths in every Iraqi city. In 2003, twelve months after US troops arrived, the number of terrorists was estimated to be 78; in 2007, the number reached 5,425. American soldiers were working hard to bring safety to the cities, while Jihadists on one side and Al-Qaida on another side were working hard to put the country under mass disruptions and threat; and worse than this, when American troops left the country, the Islamic State found its chance to settle in and start its crimes against humanity. The number of foreign fighters in Iraq has also multiplied, and they have brought with them suicide bombs and other skills like gun-running, forgery, and smuggling (Crawford). The long occupation of Iraq enabled terrorist groups to form and fight, since the Iraqi government was unable to garner extensive legitimacy and police its border. The United States did not fully consider how prolonged war would enable groups who utilized terrorist tactics to destroy Iraq. However, the terrorism roused by the war in Iraq is, as of now, turning into Iraq’s greatest cost over these years of war (Crawford).

The situation in Iraq months after the invasion was so chaotic and varied across the country. In the aftermath of the US invasion and five years after the end of Saddam’s rule, life in cities like Bagdad, Basra, Falluja, Kirkuk became horrible and the people did not have normal lives. Mark Levine claims that “we see the combination of beauty and

ugliness in post-invasion Baghdad, often in the same images—it is almost impossible to determine what Baghdad was about in the chaotic aftermath of the US” (263). The absence of relief and the disruption of the daily lives of residents reduced any hope of a return to normalcy and the residents lived in constant fear of going out due to explosions everywhere. Serious damage turned cities into wasteland. Most citizens of Baghdad, as a result of the decrease in the quality of life and the hopeless situation of war, began to wish they were still under Saddam’s regime. Levine claims that one Baghdad resident explained, “Saddam Hussein was harsh and coercive, but at least we were living. I could work, earn money, and go out to 3-4 in the morning. Now, I’m not living” (264). After the US occupation, no one was allowed to stay out late at night because of curfews in place to improve security.

The Iraq invasion did not liberate the Iraqi people as they had hoped, and the high cost of war injured or killed not only many soldiers but also civilians. The strategies that the United States used failed to bring democracy to the Iraqi people, because insurgency in Iraq continues and bombings and shootings have not ceased. For this reason, the Iraq government asked the United States to withdraw its troops in 2011. No country likes to be colonized. Levine noted in her documentary about Baghdad, “the occupation must end one day because Iraqis, like other people around the world, won’t accept occupation” (264).

Besides, no one can be sure of the exact number of Iraqi civilians killed or injured since the 2003 United States invasion, since not all war-related deaths have been recorded precisely by the Iraqi government and the US-driven coalition. However, some studies estimated that approximately 165,000 civilians have died from direct war-related

casualties brought about by the US. The brutal deaths of Iraqi civilians came through aerial bombing, shelling, explosions, suicide assaults, and fires started by bombing. (McBride and Stern 2). The fight still threatens the lives of people and causes damage to Iraqi health care and other infrastructure which has not yet been restored. People are still dying in huge numbers and the deaths not only include men but are largely of women and children.

Clare Kapp quotes UNICEF's Iraq representative Carel de Rooy, who "said that aside from the physical suffering, an estimated half a million traumatized children in Baghdad and other besieged cities will need psychosocial rehabilitation after the war" (1). War has had very negative impacts on most Iraqi children. The Gulf Wars have caused many psychological and disease problems in children. Many suffer from either abnormal weight or malnutrition, especially children under the age of five. Rania Masri illustrates, "The death of hundreds of thousands of children is unjustifiable. Already, more than half a million children under the age of five have been killed by this blockade. 4,500 children are dying every month. How many more must die? How many more mothers must cry helplessly?" (Masri). As Rania Masri goes on to detail, the economic problems caused by the Gulf War have caused most Iraqi children to struggle daily. They have been, and continue to be, treated badly and unjustly as a result of the poor circumstances in Iraq. Large numbers of children are not getting access to education, and development opportunities have been severely restricted. They have been forced to make money in order to help their parents. Indeed, some Iraqi children spend their days begging on the streets or selling cigarettes to drivers. This is negative to their health and their education. Additionally, many children have been injured by the war and

consequent violence. Many have lost feet, arms, and most importantly their innocence, and their families are unable to offer the most basic support because of poverty (Masri).

Moreover, in the course of recent years, Iraqi women have over and over again endured the impacts of armed clash. Following 2003, greater numbers of women have progressively gotten caught in the crossfire, have been murdered or injured in mass explosions, and have been displaced from their homes. Following cultural tradition, women are focused on upholding their conduct and their role in the public ground, but they are particularly vulnerable and thus helpless against this harsh society: they are now assaulted, captured, or killed. According to Valeria Cetorelli :

The post-2003 period has witnessed a deterioration in women's status as a result of widespread violence and rising conservatism. The dire security situation, combined with the resurgence of sectarian, tribal, and generally conservative forces, has severely restricted women's possible roles outside the home and may have induced many to enter marriage and childbearing earlier than they might have in the absence of war (583).

Furthermore, the status of women has been deteriorating in society since 2003: most women lost their jobs and left their education. They sacrificed both their financial independence and liberation, and instead they have been concentrating merely on providing food and clean water to ensure that their families could survive.

Thus Iraqi women have been oppressed economically through sanctions and three successive wars. In fact, most women anticipated that the American removal of Saddam's regime would bring them more freedom both at home and in society. Hanny Megally, Executive Director of the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights, said, "if Iraqi women are to participate in postwar society, their physical security needs to be an urgent priority" ("Iraq: Insecurity and Violence Dominate Women's Lives"). Yet the safety of women is still an issue in Iraq, and many women are afraid to go outside alone

without their escort because of the insecurity in the streets (“Iraq: Insecurity and Violence Dominate Women’s Lives”). Women also face another problem due to interpretations of Islamic law, and this can be seen in most southern cities of Iraq. Indeed, once Saddam was removed, Shiites were freer to conduct religious classes. Indeed, during Saddam Hussein’s regime, religion was not included in the political processes of government, but unfortunately after the downfall of Saddam, there was an increase in the number of Islamic groups, and religion became part of politics. This resulted in the imposition of stricter interpretations of conservative Islamist rulings that have restricted women’s freedom. The conservative society, combined with the security problems associated with a weaker government, made life very hard for women (“Women Were More Respected Under Saddam, Say Women’s Groups”).

Many authors have written literary fiction about the Iraq war to sympathize with the Iraqi people and the circumstances involving Iraq. However, very few of these authors combined their real-life experience of war with the perspective of the victims of war. Benjamin Buchholz served in the Wisconsin National Guard during his operation in the south of Safwan, Iraq, and he observed the emotional costs of that war and the way it damaged soldiers and civilians alike. In his novel, *One Hundred and One Nights*, Buchholz represents moments of war and provides clear pictures of Middle Eastern women and cultural changes in post-war Iraqi society that have altered the conservative society. In addition, the novel tells the story from the unique perspectives of a mentally-broken Iraqi man, Abu Saheeh, and an adolescent Iraqi girl named Layla, who is fascinated with American culture.

Chapter 2: Brief Background on the Author and Plot Summary of *One Hundred and One Nights*

Matt Borondy notes that Benjamin Buchholz is a contemporary American author who writes fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. He lived with his family in Oman while stationed there from 2010 to 2011. Presently, Buchholz lives in Princeton, N.J., where he is working on a graduate degree in Middle East Security Studies. Indeed, he became a writer due to experiences during his tour of duty in the Iraqi city of Safwan. He served in southern Iraq with the Wisconsin National Guard. Based on his experiences in Iraq, he decided to write fiction representing true events that happened in that country. In a recent interview about his book, he said, “The focus has been on my personal experience in the village of Safwan and how that influenced the work” (qtd. in Borondy). Carole Goldberg adds that he explained his sadness and frustration as a soldier when, on the second day of his military service in Iraq, he observed the death of a six-year-old Iraqi girl, crushed on the road by one of the military convoys a few hundred meters from the Kuwaiti border. The girl was struck and killed by a military convoy while she was trying to catch a bottle of water thrown as a gift to children along the roadside. Buchholz said, “Nothing in my experience prepared me for the chaos of that scene: women wailing and pulling their hair, the father of the girl haggling over the price of his daughter’s life” (Goldberg). The image of the body of the girl covered with a blanket on the road haunted Buchholz because he had children of the same age. When the death of the girl impacted him so strongly, it gave him a sudden shock of the reality of the situation. This event inspired him to be a writer in addition to his duty as a full time soldier in Iraq (Buchholz, “Fiction Born”).

Furthermore, according to Carole Goldberg, as part of a Wisconsin National Guard Unit, he served as a Civil Affairs Officer in Safwan from 2005 to 2006 and

worked closely and communicated with the Iraqi civilians. From the experiences that he had in town and with its people, he wrote a nonfiction book called *Private Soldiers*. By showing Safwan from the viewpoint of the Iraqis, Buchholz's book ushers readers deeply into the misery and anguish that has formed the country's recent history. His descriptions in the book express true moments of what life is truly like for the residents and the way they endured the cruel circumstances of life in this harsh world of war. As an author, he excels in showing Iraq's war from different perspectives than what we see on the news. He employed the viewpoints of the Iraqi people and showed a side of their life that was never discussed before (Goldberg).

According to Meg Jones, Buchholz is currently a 36-year-old major in the military. Buchholz ended up a novelist after being involved in many different sports and military deployments. Initially, he was scouted as a hockey player by a few universities, but he eventually picked West Point. However, he broke his shoulder in several places during a game against Dartmouth in his freshman year, so he was benched as a sophomore. Buchholz studied Arabic for two semesters, and he visited Egypt as part of an exchange program. Moreover, he met several visiting officers from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan during American officer training programs. He chose to leave West Point after two years and eventually transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he earned a degree in classics while being an active ROTC member (Jones).

Meg Jones notes that after deploying to Iraq in 2005-06 with the Wisconsin National Guard, he chose to become an active duty member of the Army and was chosen for the Army Foreign Affairs Officer Program. This program allowed him to begin studying Arabic at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. A one-year

cultural immersion program allowed him to travel in the Middle East and study a four-month course in Arabic in Oman. During this period he wrote his non-fiction book called *Private Soldiers*, which is about his year in Kuwait and Iraq. He similarly transformed his recollections and memories of Iraq into short fiction before he wrote *One Hundred and One Nights*. One of his award-winning short stories published in *Storyglossia* was seen by agent Jon Sternfeld of the Irene Goodman Literary Agency, who later contacted Buchholz about whether he had any other book ideas and quickly became his agent (Jones).

Buchholz had created his first novel, *One Hundred and One Nights*, at different stages in his life. He wrote a significant part during his lunch breaks at the Defense of Language Institute in Monterey, California. While he was studying Arabic there, he also studied the writing style of *One Thousand and One Nights* (Jones), the well-known collection of Middle Eastern stories and folk tales that includes “The Tale of Scheherazade,” the story of a lord whose first wife was unfaithful, so he vows to marry one woman at a time, for one night, and execute her in the morning so that he will never again be cheated. When Scheherazade marries him, she asks permission to tell him a story, and she continues the story every night without ending it, so her husband won’t execute her in the morning because he becomes eager to hear the story’s end; after 1,001 nights he realizes he is in love with her and takes her truly to be his wife.

Jones also shows how Buchholz wrote other parts of *One Hundred and One Nights* during his deployment to Iraq, in inactive periods when many soldiers were playing video games or watching television. After composing three drafts, he felt he had created an original manuscript that was suitable to send to publishers. His agent rapidly

sold the book to Little, Brown and Company after seeing how interesting the book was from the first page, and he quickly got the support of others to buy the novel. Its success established Benjamin Buchholz as an emerging voice in American Literature. Currently, Buchholz is working on his Master's degree in Middle Eastern Studies at Princeton. He expects to complete his degree in January, and he plans either to be assigned to an abroad posting or to work as a cultural liaison with Army leaders. Despite his busy life of classes at Princeton and raising two sons with his wife, he continues writing more novels (Jones).

One of his new works, a novel called *Taxi to Queen Alia*, is about the assassination of an American diplomat and his wife outside of the US Embassy in Amman, Jordan. In it, Buchholz uses the culture differences that he remembers from his experience in the Middle East. As a writer, he considers culture an important theme in several projects that he is currently working on. He wrote a blog about his experiences in the Middle East called "Not Quite Right" to provide insights and observations on the overabundance of things in the Middle East that seem a bit strange to him (Buchholz, "Reading Group Guide" 7).

Buchholz says he is quite aware that it is very easy to write a novel from the perspective of an American soldier, but, truthfully, he did not want to discuss his personal experiences. Instead, he chose all the characters in *One Hundred and One Nights* to be Iraqis, which gives the novel a different insight into the war. In an interview, he said, "writing about them [Iraqi people] allowed me to think more clearly about them, about their problems and the ways they might have interacted during the war that consumed them" ("Reading Group Guide" 3). He wanted to write about what Iraqis have gone

through and how personal war is. Moreover, he wanted to describe all the events that really happened to people in *One Hundred and One Nights*, and that is why his novel is considered innovative by most editors, authors, and reviewers (Jones).

One Hundred and One Nights is Buchholz's first written work that reflects his reaction to the death of a young Iraqi girl. The novel focuses on Abu Saheeh, who is an American-educated Iraqi doctor who tries to come to grips with the meaning of war. Having returned to his country after 13 years in America, he settles in the south of Iraq in order to build a new life: "I'm not sure which of my two selves actually takes the box from Seyyed Abdullah, whether I am at that moment the regenerating man who is starting his life over or the shriveled soul of a man who can no longer think, speak, or reason without his ghost surrounding him" (166). While he has desires to restart his life, he is being pulled in a darker direction. He noticed that the nation has been utterly changed by the American military presence. He starts a small mobile-phone kiosk in an Iraqi village near the border of Kuwait. Buchholz goes back and forth in time of Abu's life before he came to Safwan and his present life there now (Goldberg). In Safwan, "Abu's business allows him to watch the daily convoys of American soldiers and trucks laden with supplies that roll through the outskirts of the city" ("*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz").

In the meantime, he meets a street urchin named Layla; she is fourteen years old, has odd, blue eyes, and she comes to his shop every day to visit with him. Layla is fascinated with American popular culture and does not seem to have a family. She keeps charming him by talking about American movie stars and culture. As she describes her interest in American culture, Abu always thinks back to his dark and deadly past when he

was in America. He wants to be free from the past because of these painful memories. Some of his memories relate to his childhood, his time spent with his family, including his friend and fiancée, Nadia. Layla stands as a major character in the novel. Layla conveys stories of America to Abu Saheeh in her own innocent way. Later in the novel Layla enters Abu's fantasies and even his waking dreams while he is drunk. Layla eventually exists between the layers of imagining and waking for Abu Saheeh to such an extent that he cannot tell if she is real. The narrative implies, indeed, that she was a piece of his imagination the entire time. I found Layla to be fascinating and such an intriguing character, with her clever stories and things she does to capture the attention of Abu Saheeh. Layla is also a character who exists between truth and fiction, not just for Abu Saheeh, but also for the reader. The book presents vivid images of an Iraqi woman (Goldberg).

One Hundred and One Nights tells about all the Iraqi characters and thereby provides a deep layer of illusion. The character of Abu Saheeh who has been destroyed because of the war and the sense of anger inside him has continued because of the loss of his daughter in war: "that collection of trinkets: bird bones, dollhouse keys, little bits of salvaged debris from the burned remains of my life in Baghdad, little bits of my daughter" (Buchholz 329). His daughter is buried in Baghdad and the only trinket that remains with him is her anklet. "I've suspected that Layla isn't real for a long time, but I didn't know why," Abu Saheeh continues; "But the anklet: it tells me something. At that first sight of Layla wearing the anklet, I should have known that she was nothing more than a ghost, a genie, a haunting, but I couldn't admit to myself" (Buchholz 328). Throughout the story, the keepsakes he has gathered throughout the years are triggers for

his hallucinations. Indeed, his imagination and unresolved past tragedies have created his hallucinations to process his personal loss. The character of Layla is no more than a fiction created by Abu Saheeh and represents his emotional release and a means to seek comfort to help him in his moments of sadness and grief: “Layla is not real. I know that for certain. She is my fiction, my fiction” (Buchholz 329). He has used alcohol as a means to forcibly forget his thirteen years of living in America as a physician since his arrival to Iraq (Buchholz 329).

Moreover, Buchholz’s use of flashbacks in the novel is a technique utilized in order to tell the story in a nonlinear narrative. A non-chronological order of storytelling is also used in *Arabian Nights* in well-known tales such as “Sinbad the Sailor” (Cram 101). In this respect, Buchholz “use[d] the framework of ‘One Thousand and One Nights,’ the famous collection of middle Eastern Stories” (Jones).

In addition, all significant characters are Iraqi. The author narrates the life of Abu Saheeh at a present time since his arrival to Iraq in 2003 during the invasion of Iraq, when he was completely disappointed in Iraq’s the situation. This novel probes into the diminishing sense of being human and the increasing frustration of Abu Saheeh. He is barely able to laugh. And at the same time, the story highlights the past memories and milestones of Abu Saheeh, the events that have made him into the person he is, however fragmented. For example, the fourth chapter explains his dark memories from childhood of living with his father and brother (Yassin) in Iraq during Saddam’s government. His relations with his brother had never been good because he was continuously hurt by him and had very bad memories. When they were children, Yassin treated him badly and when they got older, Yassin joined the military and worked with the Baathists; Yassin

then tried to persuade him to spy on America. Another significant memory of Abu Saheeh's includes the scholarship that he received from Saddam's government in 1984 to attend medical programs in the United States (Buchholz 36). His travels to the United States play a part in his unsuccessful relationship with his childhood fiancée, Nadia. While Nadia and Abu Saheeh had a longtime relationship that started when they were children, he unfortunately chose not to marry her. Even though he brought Nadia to the United States for marriage, he met Annie, an American woman whom he met in the hospital after she murdered her husband (Buchholz 136). Abu Saheeh was attracted to her despite her admission of the crime to him. Even though he continuously visited her in prison, they never married. At the same time, Abu Saheeh told his longtime friend, Bashar, to marry Nadia. His choice to pursue Annie and a life in the United States are factors in his twisted past. His friend Bashar married Nadia.

All these memories are important to him as a narrator, however. These memories give meaning to the madness because they explain every single detail for each moment in his life (Buchholz 136). Furthermore, there are other characters who have entered the life of Abu Saheeh during his new life in Safwan: Mahmoud, the guard; Hussein, the leader of Hezbollah; Seyyed Abdullah, the educated and wealthy man; and Abd al-Rahim. All of them have significant roles in the story and affect the life of Abu Saheeh in some way. But it is not until the final moments of the story that readers realize how these last characters have been fundamental in the plot—Abu has planned to seek revenge on Yassin, whom he holds responsible for the death of his daughter. While Layla was a figment of his imagination, the horrific, real death of his daughter is intricately related to his brother's cruelty and membership with the Baathists. Even though the reader does not

know the details, the need to avenge her death is mandated by Abu Saheeh's belief in "an eye for an eye"; ultimately, however, he is not able to avenge his daughter (Buchholz 342).

In important respects, the book resembles the great Middle Eastern epic, *One Thousand and One Nights*; this resemblance is deliberate, for the author is working with traditions of oral storytelling programmed into humankind through generations. In the book, Abu Saheeh tells us his story gradually, day by day, in a style similar to the great *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Furthermore, the similarity between the texts *One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz and *One Thousand and One Nights* (also known as the *Arabian Nights*) is obvious through the similar titles and also because both works describe the past based on experiences of life in Arabia. The two titles indicate the number of events happening in the life of the protagonists. Moreover, the harsh world has amplified the impact of events in the lives of these individuals in relation to their problems meeting the needs of a demanding and divergent society. Hence, the title acts as a directive to what is happening in the two narratives. Indeed, the character Layla is similar to Scheherazade, based on how she is trying to entertain Abu Saheeh by providing stories of an American pop culture: "No reason other than the fact that this Layla entertains me. And, because she entertains me, I am somehow predisposed to be kind to her in return, to engage in this sort of small talk with her, she makes me laugh inside myself" (Buchholz 13). Similarly, *One Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of stories that Scheherazade tells her husband in order to entertain him enough to postpone her execution. In both texts, stories act to calm the angered and emotionally betrayed, even though the two texts have different endings.

Furthermore, the book gives unique pictures of the culture and daily life of the residents of Safwan and Baghdad. A *Kirkus Review* says, “The author is an astute observer, turning sights, sounds and smells into eloquent snips of the lives of a people who have sustained great loss and devastation” (“*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”). Buchholz’s writing is distinctive, maybe excessively clear for some in light of the fact that he dismisses no subtle element of the slaughter that pervades Iraq’s present and recent past. At the same time, the story that begins so clear and convincing blurs and plunges in the last part of the book, leaving the reader both moved and confused at the same time (“*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”). Further, Buchholz depicts the character Layla as “rooted subconsciously, in the little girl fatally caught underneath the American convoy” (Jones). After Buchholz wrote about the young girl in poems and stories, he has used his creativity and intellect to display vividly the relationship between Layla and Abu Saheeh and this girl’s haunting of the soul of this broken man (Jones). Buchholz also gives clear detail about the status of Iraqi women and the cultural changes to the conservative society that came from the war in Iraq. He artistically provides the reader with a vision of the conservative culture of Iraq, showing how a young Iraqi girl dreams of a different life to escape the harsh reality of war.

Chapter 3: Post-Colonialism

Countries from the African and Asian continents, particularly the Indian sub-continent and Middle East, have been defined by the struggle to establish their identities. The conflict has been attributed to their colonization by other countries. The colonial countries practice and broaden their power by controlling undeveloped countries or areas.

The dominant relationship between these countries resulted in social, cultural, economic, political and broad cultural exchanges which distinguished the European nations from the indigenous peoples who were controlled. This dominant relationship created notions of racial inferiority and exotic otherness. Peter Childs and R. J Patrick Williams write:

The disassembling of structures of colonial control, beginning in earnest in the late 1950s and reaching its high point in the 1960s, constituted a remarkable historical moment, as country after country gained independence from the colonizing powers. That so many millions now live in the world formed by decolonization is one justification for the use term post-colonialism. (1)

Post-colonial study could be seen as an outline for a variety of disciplines and theories. According to Leela Gandhi, “post-colonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revising, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (4). This theory discusses the problems of past situations and uncovers them to people, as well as depicts historical detail while promising a complex project of psychological recovery (Gandhi 16). In addition, this theory refers to the historical period and could be understood as a phase of imperialism and globalization of capitalism, but it is not limited to those definitions (Parker 289). In fact, post-colonialism as a term appears in the middle of the 20th century, since most undeveloped countries and peoples were colonized for a period of time. It studies the effects that colonialism and imperialism had on people and their countries while debating the effect that colonizers have had on cultures and the societies of others. Childs and Williams point out that “we use the term ‘post-colonial’ to cover all culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial

aggression” (3). Moreover, it concerns how European countries mastered and controlled third world societies and how these groups have reacted to and opposed those violations.

It is hard to give one definition to post-colonialism because it involves different explorations. Many scholars of post-colonialism wrote about colonial nations, and what happened after this period; however, it can be argued that we still live in a colonial time, not postcolonial times (Parker 286). The term is associated with the post-structuralist approaches of most famous post-colonial theorists, such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. Thus, post-colonialism is an expression which has appeared as a suitable label for the study of colonialism, and more widely, for learning about culture and political relations among more and less powerful peoples and nations. The post-colonial literary studies are more concerned with the term of colonizing, and some scholars refer to those colonizing nations as “metropolitan” (Parker 287).

Further, post-colonialism as a school constructs scholarly spaces for the subaltern peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices. The subaltern people are the colonized or “inferior” classes who do not have freedom to express their own opinion or identity, and thus they depend upon the language and methods of the ruling class to express themselves. In fact, those people are imposed on by being in a colonized state, and they are considered inferior because of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and so on. In the meantime, in the 1980s, a group of people who were scholars in south Asia interested in post-colonialism and post-imperialism advocated south Asian studies; they were most concerned about the history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity. In other words, “‘The subaltern studies’ defined itself as an attempt to allow ‘people’ finally to

to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and, in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of, truly oppressed” (Gandhi 2).

Additionally, scholars started to speak and write radical essays and books to support the rights of colonized or third world countries. To have a look at post-colonial India, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a post-colonial critic, speaks out against racism and class bias of western academies in 1985 in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak explores the manner in which western societies have subordinated different societies, or “Eastern cultures” (Gandhi 2). Spivak utilizes the example of the Indian Sati habit of widow suicide, yet the main principle of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is located in its first part, which displays the ethical problems of governing a different society based on “all universal” concepts and frameworks (Gandhi 2). Spivak points out that third world countries have been continually corrupted by the political and economic interests of the west. At the end of her essay, she declared that, in fact, the “subaltern cannot speak” with its own voice; it can speak only with the language and voice of the oppressor. They are unable to speak because the western theoretical field is unable to empathize with the other field; besides, the west cares only about its own particular worldview (Gandhi 2).

Indeed, Spivak referred to subalterns as the oppressed subjects among colonial people, those unable to speak with authority. She focused her attention “on the question of who speaks for the colonial ‘other’ and the relationship of the ownership of discourse and representation to development of the postcolonial subjectivity” (Brewton 11). Furthermore, as a brave Indian theorist, she confronted risk in her argument about subaltern people, asking, “Can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?”

(Gandhi vi) In fact, Spivak, as a woman, encourages but, at the same time, criticizes efforts of post-colonial study groups for not re-establishing voices for Indian colonial people who were economically suppressed to use their voice, as they depended upon western society.

Post-colonial criticism provides us with an important critique of the ideology of colonial domination and, at the same time, critics in this school reject the oriental thought produced by the imaginative geography of western scholars. Besides, they seek to negate the economic divides between east and west, civilized and uncivilized, first and third world (Brewton 11). In fact, this theoretical school seeks to heal the colonial condition as it attempts to show the colonizer and colonized both as a historical materialization embodied in the dialectic of master-and-slave. Further, the theoretical school is undertaking many tasks as a framework to undo most of the effects produced by the imperialistic countries (Gandhi 16).

Edward Said, as a theorist, tries to evaluate a specific pattern of western thought which he calls “orientalism.” He explains a common understanding of imperialism and colonialism as epistemological and presents a cultural outlook which accompanies the habit of dominating and, whenever possible, ruling distant regions. In fact, he exposes the ideological deceptions of imperialism (Gandhi 66). In this regard, he illustrates that western scholarship created the thought of “the orient” through their imaginative geography—an idea that has been a tool in the colonialization and domination of non-western society. He challenges the generalizations made by western scholars about the part of the world known as “East” (qtd. in Singh). Indeed, Edward Said points out that “Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the

difference between the familiar (Europe, West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)” (qtd. in Singh). At the end of his debate, he concluded that west is west and east is east, and nothing of two shall meet (qtd. in Singh).

Said observed how imperial societies take adventures in the theoretical “East” and therefore feel as though they have authority over it. Said analyzed the European political control of the Middle East, pointing out that “we are dealing with different empires, different needs, and different levels of territorial penetration, control and exploitation. Unevenness manifests itself, too, in the fact that . . . some other areas, notably the Middle East and China, were not colonies, but were more effected by ‘colonialism’ than many countries that were” (qtd. in Childs and Williams 10). Said criticizes the images that imperialism imposed on Middle Easterners, and he reveals their purpose.

But colonialism is not so easily done away with; most Middle Eastern countries continue to be influenced by imperialism or dominated by countries of power until relatively recently. Looking at the history of Iraq, there is no doubt that most observers will agree with Edward Said’s statement, “True, Saddam Hussein’s regime was a despicable one and in every way deserved to be removed. Also true is the sense of anger many feel at how outlandishly cruel and despotic that regime was, and how dreadful has been the suffering of Iraq’s people” (Said, et al. 273). Nonetheless, the reason that Western powers were ready to bomb Iraq and to end its government was not out of humanitarian interests, but completely as a show of military power (Said, et al. 273). Said states that “since the early twentieth century, the Arabs have never been able to achieve their collective independence as a whole or in part exactly because of the designs on the strategic and cultural importance of their lands by outside powers” (Said, et al. 274).

While Said was speaking about the past in the Middle East, his statements can be extended to present-day Iraq, since the country once enjoyed alliances with Western countries despite its poor human rights record. However, once the regime lost the favor of its Western backers, they occupied the country and scarred the soul of the Iraqi civilization. Said highlighted that, “as for American plans in Iraq, it is now absolutely clear that what is going to happen is nothing less than an old-fashioned colonial occupation, rather like Israel’s since 1967” (Said, et al. 276). This occupation brings very serious threats to many Arab countries as a whole. Furthermore, today, anyone can see the country of Iraq as a victim of invasion, collapsed and beaten down, unable to stabilize or to try to submit and redraw a Middle East map for the sake of matching Western power interests (Said, et al. 277). Said emphasizes that “Beginning in American-style democracy to Iraq means basically aligning the country with U.S. policy, that is, a peace treaty with Israel, oil markets for American profit, and civil order kept to a minimum that permits neither real opposition nor real institution-building. Perhaps even the idea is to turn Iraq into civil-war Lebanon” (Said, et al. 276). In reality, today Iraq has turned to civil war because of extreme religious parties, and the war between different parties has gotten worse; life has gotten harder for a people who are from different parties such as Shi’ite, Sunni, Christian, or Jewish, and yet live alongside each other in one country. For these reasons, many people have left the country to save their lives.

Without a doubt, most Arab countries have faced the same problem, and this conflict as a structure has continued for more than a decade among Arab nations. To look at Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan and other countries, an observer sees chaos everywhere. Definitely, not all the problems in these countries came from outside, but the

historical background and political issues played a great role in what would be considered crucial problems (Said, et al. 277). Furthermore, most Arab countries are powerless and are unable to bring democracy to society, the problem being that Arab governments do not open their societies to their people and let them be active and speak; the oppression of security measures thus prevent an organization of parties which could stand in opposition to imperialism (Said, et al. 277). Indeed, a people who are surrounded by war, silenced, and repressed, will never be able to have a voice in order to achieve their democracy (Said, et al. 277). In fact, democracy as a core is missing from such countries. Said points out that “the absence of democracy is partially the result of alliances made between powers on the one hand, and minority ruling regimes or parties on the other, not because the Arabs have no interest in democracy, but because democracy has been seen as a threat by several actors in the drama” (Said, et al. 277). Furthermore, as Said indicates, “Today no Arab state is free to dispose of its resources as it wishes, or to take positions that represent that individual state’s interests, especially if those interests seem to threaten U.S. policies” (Said, et al. 274-75).

On the other hand, post-colonialism can be used to provide an understanding of cultural differences. It is a way of examining unconsciously changed culture through literature, and it is more than just people adjusting to changes; rather, it also includes the relationship between the changed (colonized) and changer (colonizer). Indeed, within this very relationship, the unconscious assimilation that’s at the heart of post-colonialism comes into being (Kambysellis). Bhabha argues “that cultural identities cannot be ascribed to pre-given, irreducible, scripted, ahistorical cultural traits that define the

conventions of ethnicity. Nor can ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ be viewed as separate entities that define themselves independently” (qtd. in Graves).

Furthermore, cultural exchange as a result of colonialism may involve positive and negative sides, and parts of these changes can bring economical, educational, or medical benefits but at the same time can bring harmful side effects, such as loss of traditions and values (Kambyzellis 1). People who live under colonialism struggle not only with adjustment to a new culture but also with the oppression resulting from this exposure. The colonizers, in the presence of a new culture, consider that their culture is superior (Kambyzellis 1). The problems of crossed identity and imposed inferiority and even an intense hatred for the colonist is apparent in the perception of the occupied people. Thus arises the collision of two cultures where one of the cultures is assumed superior (Kambyzellis 1). Stephen Slemon (from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*) cites “‘post-colonial’ as ‘the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independent national groupings’” and as “‘the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalistic or Eurocentric concepts and images’” (qtd. in Kambyzellis 1). Indeed, this displays the repression that overtakes the colonized countries where an oppressor has lost his identity as a human being. Further, Kambyzellis emphasizes that “post-colonialism deals more with the unconscious and lasting effects the colonizer imposes upon a people by his mere presence—those aspects of his culture that are osmotically absorbed and integrated into the colonized population” (3).

Additionally, Homi Bhabha refers to cultures as total histories, to which he applied the term “hybrid,” meaning mixture of cultures, to allude to cross-cultural exchanges and

significant shifts in politics, economics, religion, etc., in recent history: “the shifts of recent history leave the world not so much divided between colonizers and colonized as (in post-colonialist lingo) hybrid. Cultural hybridity comes from the way that colonized people and colonizers have taken on many of each other’s way of living and thinking” (Parker 288). Bhabha refers to culture as transnational, since cultures “are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacements,” and as translational, “because such spatial histories of displacement” are now being furthered by regional ambitions of global media technology—which make defining culture and its significance complicated (Bhabha 247).

Post-colonialism as a method struggles to support the independence of native people and at the same time exposes us to resistance against imperialism, cultural inferiority, and an ideology of colonial domination; these are among the most important topics to most of the critics of this field, as was mentioned above in a number of contexts by different critics.

For Buchholz to share his viewpoint on war from the perspective of the people that his nation occupied is a display of courage, particularly since he is protesting the way that armed forces are being used by politicians to secure economic or military interest in the name of freedom. In fact, Buchholz states, “I think it is an issue of empathy, of trying to understand other people. Writing from my own point of view of someone culturally similar to me would have been boring” (“Reading Group Guide” 5). Based on the theory of post-colonialism, Buchholz’s novel, *One Hundred and One Nights*, displays a portrait to his American audience of the culture collision or exchange of culture and its effect on women. Moreover, the author explores how colonized countries are affected by the culture of others as a result of interaction between the colonized and colonizer. Layla, in

the novel as a fourteen-year-old, showed her interest in American culture. In the novel, every time she meets Abu Saheeh, she explains to him her knowledge about American movie stars. Maybe her wish is to have a country and culture like that, because her country doesn't give her freedoms and opportunities as a female child. In addition, whenever she opens her eyes to see, she witnesses war everywhere, and she is sure she will not gain anything except sadness despite her bravery to continue fighting in such a difficult life.

Chapter 4: Feminism

Unlike post-colonialism, feminism is focused on advocating for the rights of women, founded on social, political and economic grounds as compared to men. Patricia Collins explains, throughout history, the rights of women were largely ignored and not taken into consideration because women were viewed as inferior and playing a submissive role. Women had fewer positions in regards to cultural roles within patriarchal societies. Many theorists have emerged in order to build modern feminist theory for the sake of supporting women's rights (Collins).

Further, modern feminist theory emerged as a result of different feminist movements. The first large-scale women's movement arose in the 19th and early 20th centuries to fight for women's right to vote, property rights, employment, equal rights in marriage, and a position of equal power and authority, both politically and socially. The so-called "Second Wave" of feminism focused on the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s and was directed against barriers of gender equality, addressing issues such as sexuality, reproductive rights, and women's roles in both work and home. The

“Third Wave” was related to the feminist politics and movements that started in the 1980s and continue to this day. This Third Wave reacted against the Second Wave and is concerned with problems such as gay, lesbian, transgender people, and it questions the ideologies surrounding notions of womanhood in general (Collins).

Directly after World War II, feminist theorists arose to support the rights of women. In 1949 one of these theorists, Simone de Beauvoir, who was raised against the idea of “woman in the home,” argued against the bourgeoisie thought “that woman’s place be in the home as her emancipation becomes a real threat; even within the working class, men tried to thwart women’s liberation because women were becoming dangerous competitors especially as women were used to working for low salaries” (12). She made radical arguments about women in her book *The Second Sex*. She also pointed out that “woman has always been, if not man’s slave, at least his vassal; the two sexes have never divided the world up equally; and still today, even though her condition has changed, women are heavily handicapped. In no country is her legal status identical to man’s, and often it puts her at a considerable disadvantage” (9). Beauvoir addressed the oppression of women in detail and pointed to the inferiority of women compared to men as they have gained a second position in most societies. She argued, “Why is it that this world has always belonged to men and that only today things are beginning to change? Is this change a good thing? Will it bring about an equal sharing of the world between men and women or not?” (10). In fact, her question revealed the historical domain assigned to women. Women were always considered passive and inferior compared to men. And she answered that question by confirming that “women in general are today inferior to men; that is, their situation provides them with fewer possibilities: the question is whether this

state of affairs must be perpetuated” (13). Beauvoir was trying to point out that a woman has the right to experience the outside world, and to participate in social activities. She insisted that “the conservative Bourgeoisie continues to views women’s liberation as a danger threatening their morality and their interests” (13). Beauvoir encouraged women to change their status and for women to be active in society and to examine their role in culture. She illustrated that some men “feel threatened by women’s competition” (13). As in her book, one of the male students declared, “Every woman student who takes a position as a doctor or a lawyer is stealing a place from us” (13). She notes that women also oppressed economically, even though some women assume that their role is equal to or better than men.

Most of second wave political feminism is concerned with the rights of women in contemporary societies, with women’s identity, and with the representation of women in culture and media (Brewton 11). Judith Butler, a gender and feminist theorist, has contributed to the feminist political approach by premising her arguments on the notion of performativity. She acknowledges that, founded on performativity, gender merely exists because of being made ritualistic and repetitive. The continued ritualistic and repetitive features of gender performativity have resulted in prospects for new as well as transgressive behaviors (Butler 4). Indeed, Butler displays the term “repetition,” which “is something we must determine how best to be ‘in,’ how best to enact” (Nash171). Furthermore, “Butler wants to understand gender as a performance, and one way to handle this circumstance is to encourage us to be aware of how we repeat, how we play, how we perform, how we act out gender identity” (Nash 172). Additionally, she exposes categories of identity as they apply to the subject of feminist inquiry. The categories of

identity under critique here “include those of sex, gender, and the body, all of which are shown to be discursively produced and so to be the effects of various institutions, practices, and discourses” (Nash172). In fact, Butler was not only trying to expose the normative and regulative functions of gender but also their marginalized practices, which have troubled previous feminist inquiry; she did so, in hopes of proliferating more gendered possibilities (Nash172). Butler shows that “the indeterminacy of sex/gender, indeed the fictive nature of identity itself, constitutes terrain that we need to and can learn to negotiate” (Nash171). She illustrates that the indeterminacy of gender is a ground for the liberatory potential of feminism: for her, “female” is not a stable notion, its meaning being as troubled and unfixed as “woman.”

Women in the previous decades were attacked for their writing, while today women in western society can talk more openly. In the 1930s, Virginia Woolf’s feminist literary criticism explained how hard it was for a woman to represent her literary voice and took her pen to write. She reviewed the image of female and sexism in the work of male writers. She portrayed the ideology that exists between a male and a female as a writer. This signified the fact that woman’s literary history is very complicated while man’s literary history is not. (Svendsen and Lewis)

Indeed, Patricia Collins explains that the feminist movement made a change in Western society. Today, the main subjects that someone might observe in western societies were initiated by the work done by these previous waves of women, whose movements were so great that they had more successful effects in western countries; even now, there are institutions that work against domestic violence in western societies, as well as others. There are still vast inequalities that exist between men and women in

Eastern countries. The inequalities lie in legal rights, protection against domestic violence, political power and opportunities, and sexual assaults that involves many Eastern countries (Collins).

Women's legal position in Middle Eastern countries is quite different from those in the West. In the Middle East, the status of women is controlled by Islamic Laws generally, by cultural tradition or customary law, and by a reformed version of Islamic law. In fact, in the modern Middle East, secularist movements have made for a transition in the position of women particularly, since the early twentieth century. However, the status of women has not been resolved in any of these previously mentioned cultural-religious factors. Subsequently, the rights of women have not improved substantially in Middle Eastern society; as a result, Middle East governments have assumed legal reform law as a tool in order to promote and bring more rights to women (Mayer).

Customary law and traditional Islamic law leave women at an obvious disadvantage; for example, under traditional law, today, child marriage is allowed and has become a popular phenomenon—and, because of that, the rate of divorce has reached the highest levels ever seen in Middle Eastern countries. Furthermore, this problem can be seen more among uneducated families where a girl of ten years old is forced into marriage. Besides, women are restricted to marrying only one man, while men are permitted to marry four women. Such a law has given men the opportunity to practice their authority upon women (Mayer).

Additionally, women must be obedient toward their husbands, and even contact with any person outside the family must be known by her husband. As for the rule of divorce according to law, a woman cannot get divorced unless her husband agrees to

divorce. Husbands are able to divorce a wife any time by uttering the word “divorce.” Therefore, this provides a chance for a man to abuse a woman by using divorce as a threat or coercion. Moreover, divorce leaves a woman in poverty. Women also severely experience disadvantages in the realm of inheritance, where women are allowed fewer shares than men and are subordinated to male authority. Women inherit only one-half the amount of males. This is due to the idea that males were supposed to support wives, children, and households. Furthermore, much current traditional law assigns no inheritance for women whatever (Mayer).

Likewise, customary law affects the level of education in conservative societies, and the majority of families do not allow their girls to complete their education. Today, illiterate women who mainly live in rural communities are not completely aware of their legal rights, nor do they enjoy their freedom as a woman. In addition, many (although by no means all) Islamic fundamentalists who follow a wrong interpretation of Islamic law are trying to impose gender inequality by limiting the role of women to mothers and wives only. They are setting programs to train women for lives as housewives. Their goals are to restrict women by removing women from jobs outside the home, by limiting their political roles, by prohibiting birth control, and by enforcing codes to make sure that women remain under control (Mayer).

Most governments in Middle Eastern countries under the influence of European law codes are attempting to improve women’s status by applying reform laws to those conservative societies in order to eliminate the inequalities between men and women—such as by raising the age of marriage, by reducing the authority of husbands over their wives through obtaining the divorce even if they do not agree, and by reforming the law

of inheritance to the benefit of female heirs. Even though the legal status of women is not resolved at all and still is currently unstable and problematic, some Middle Eastern societies, while still largely very traditional, have worked to reform laws (Mayer). For instance, the Saudi Arabian government does not allow women to drive and women must be veiled any time they appear in public.

In comparison to some Middle Eastern countries, Iraqi women from 1958 through the 1990s had more rights and freedom, even after Saddam Hussein became president in 1979. Women had opportunities to get access to education, “civil service jobs, equal pay for equal work, and to work as a laborer in society” (Lasky). This is because the economy improved and there was a demand for female labor. Furthermore, the government passed laws to mandate literacy for the entire population, female and male, between the ages of 6 and 45. Moreover, women were given the right to vote in 1980, and more laws were passed in regards to divorce, polygamy, and inheritance that further expanded women’s rights. However, the legal rights of women and their position in society still hinged greatly on social class, religion, and rural/urban position (Lasky). For example, religious and patriarchal principles are more emphasized by rural and impoverished women than their educated and urban peers. Ultimately, this results in class differences in society and, as a result, women are economically and socially in an uneasy relationship with tradition, in which women should follow religious ideologies, norms, and notions of family such as honor and reputation (Lasky).

Still, women experienced much hardship during the Saddam Hussein regime, especially since they lived through wars against Iran and Kuwait. The war with Iran led to harsh and uncivilized governmental human rights violations, where women like men

were subjected to inhumane treatment. Women were sexually assaulted or forced into sex trafficking due to their kinship with male oppositionists. Additionally, thousands of citizens were exiled because of actual or alleged Iranian ancestry, and tens of thousands of Kurds vanished. Indeed, the Iraqi government targeted Kurds with chemical weapons. (Lasky).

As part of the politics of war, Saddam changed many rules to restrict women from traveling abroad alone and infringed on women's rights to work and seek an education, unless they majored in humanitarian aid or healthcare fields. Moreover, the government continued to brutalize its citizens, especially women. After the invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and successive Gulf conflicts, US presidents used the Kurds and Shi'ites (who were strongly repressed by Ba'athists during Saddam Hussein's government) to help in the removal of Hussein. In fact, previous uprisings were both unsuccessful and very costly in terms of human lives (Lasky).

As a result of war, many women were widowed and struggled immensely to manage their lives: they were barely able to find paid employment or could not afford to go to work. Furthermore, wages of women who still worked were reduced drastically, and many middle class women fell into poverty. Consequently, due to voluntary unschooling of female children by many families, illiteracy, prostitution, domestic abuse, and divorce have reached their highest levels. Moreover, successive conflicts and forced economic migration have led to a gender imbalance to such an extent that the number of marriages has fallen and polygamy, which had normally been predominant among rural or less educated Iraqis, has increased (Lasky).

An increasing gap between educated females and their less educated peers has resulted from a weak economy, instability, and war. This has resulted in an increase in conservative society and most women have yielded to domestic life and more female youth are seen wearing hijab. As religious expression has increased, culture and moral values are showing the different path society is taking. In 2003, the status of women worsened, especially for those who were not part of privileged classes or associated with the Ba'athists. Indeed, most women from Iraqi society would have embraced American soldiers for liberating them from the severe oppression of Saddam Hussein. However, this was only short-lived, due to mismanagement of the war and reconstruction of the country (Lasky).

Today, the status of women and women's rights in Iraq have been destroyed and thrown aside. Those rights of women that were previously mentioned are all absent under the government of Nouri al-Maliki. The invasion has widowed almost two million women, and the estimated number of orphaned children is five million, with the majority growing up without education. In addition, most women without income and protection are exposed to the marketing of sexual exploitation and religious pleasure marriages. Human Rights Watch states in 2011 that "life in Iraq is actually getting worse for women" and accused the US-backed Iraqi government of "violating with impunity the rights of Iraq's most vulnerable citizens, especially women and detainees" (Khalek).

Shortly after the downfall of Mosul, which is one of the northern cities in Iraq, by the savage group called ISIS, women encountered a tremendous level of suffering. Hundreds of women were kidnapped and raped by militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for al-jihadist al-nikah or sex jihad. Indeed, those groups forced

Christian women to wear hijab or otherwise they faced death. Additionally, women had to pay a protection tax, jizyah, in order to stay alive or safe. They created slave markets, trading and selling captured Yazidi women—who can be bought in this slave market for \$10. Truly, they have lost sight of their humanity and have severely brutalized women (Blumenfeld and Radwan).

Nowadays, many theories have emerged to explain women's rights, and there are also many organizations working hard throughout the region to return women's sacred position in the society. In reality, women in Iraq under all these environments or factors such as wars, religious conflict, and cultural tradition have had very limited freedom and cannot practice their rights like other women, even though women's rights organizations work to improve the position of women in the law. The organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq has been very active for several years and supports women's rights by promoting many platforms to eliminate all forms of discriminatory laws and establish equal participation of men and women in all spheres of life, despite the fact that millions of women still have very hard lives in Iraq and other countries.

In the book *One Hundred and One Nights*, Benjamin Buchholz represents Iraqi women as a female submitting to the culture of her society. Women have adapted to culture by following the role of society imposed on them. The author provides a description of the personality of Layla as a fourteen-year-old female who should have a normal life like many other girls of her age, but, unfortunately, she is nothing except a street girl. As Buchholz describes, she is being deprived of an education and normal life that a child might have in his or her life. This is a clear example of how Buchholz

provides a descriptive example of an Iraqi woman within the present culture and society of Iraq in terms of feminism.

PART II: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF POST COLONIALISM AND FEMINISM IN *ONE HUNDRED AND ONE NIGHTS*

Chapter 5: Literary Reviews of the Book

Readers' and reviewers' responses to this novel reflect their general culture and the ideas of war held by most people. Buchholz hopes to gain the general attention of American society so that it becomes more appreciative of the kind of work put forward in his novel. The novel is a unique form of art that built Buchholz's reputation as a writer, and it has been referred to as his novel for all time, since it deals with current issues that need to be addressed in this window of time.

Culture has been brought out clearly in the novel; the insistence that people usually refuse to change is also brought out clearly at the same time, too. An anonymous reviewer for *Kirkus Reviews* states that "The book boils with observations on the culture and daily life of the residents of Safwan and Baghdad" ("*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz"). Buchholz's service as a soldier allowed his interaction with the people of Safwan and gave him obvious opportunities to come to know the culture of the Safwani people. Furthermore, his novel shows his heartfelt appreciation of the Iraqi people for their great ability to endure. In the novel's "Acknowledgments," he writes, "I would like to thank the Safwan town council and the people of Safwan itself. They have endured three wars and the presence of our coalition troops" (Buchholz 346).

The author provides the reader with an idea of what life is like for its Middle Eastern citizens, by clarifying some of their beliefs and social practices and comparing that culture with American culture. Indeed, Buchholz excels in his descriptions. A reader

styling him/herself “Virtuous10” on Amazon.com declares: “*One Hundred and One Nights* is a great book. This is deep, intriguing, sad, suspenseful . . . excellent. This really explores the complexities of Middle East societal norms vs. American culture, the impact of war on the fighter and family, and loss of love” (Virtuous10, “One Hundred and One Nights”).

Because the novel is so well-written, one reader could not believe that this book was written by an American soldier who spent time in the Middle East during his service. This reader—“Kristin” on Goodreads.com—says that she never thought an American war veteran would be able to write such an excellent piece in the voice of an Iraqi man. The reader says that the author does mention that Western culture affected the Middle East, but she is impressed with how the concept is observed in a very beautiful way in the novel. For Kristin, most captivating were the descriptions and details that Buchholz provided about war and culture. The novel displays the life of an Iraqi man, on the one hand, she writes, but it also shows the true reality of life in the war-torn Middle East (Kristin).

Another online Goodreads.com reader, “Autumn Blues Reviews,” was fascinated by how Buchholz created an imaginative character such as Layla within the personality of Abu Saheeh, whose psyche went back and forth between reality and fantasy. In some chapters Layla stands as a real character who continues visiting Abu Saheeh at his little mobile store and, in her own innocent ways, brings tales about American culture. Later in the novel, she enters Abu Saheeh’s dreams, even his waking dream while he is intoxicated with alcohol. Indeed, Autumn Blues Reviews finds Layla to be a character that lies between truth and fiction not only for Abu Saheeh but also for the reader. Buchholz leaves readers

charmed in his piece—so much so that one could never know by reading this book that this was his first novel, since his writing transcends space and time (Autumn Blues Reviews).

Further, an American author, Hillary Jordan, reviewed the work and provides very beautiful descriptions of the novel in regard to Buchholz's excellent storytelling ability: "*One Hundred and One Nights* is a fearless and seductive piece of ventriloquism by a storyteller in full command of his craft, lyrical prose from the point of view of an Iraqi doctor haunted by violence. This first novel is a spike in the heart" (Jordan). The novel was able to touch her heart and capture her emotions as a reader immediately. She admits an amusing story, that when she as a reviewer received the copy of Buchholz's novel by mail in 2011, she did not want to review it because it was about the war in Iraq. She had received a dozen similar appeals to review novels since she had published her first novel, *Mudbound*, but she did not wish to review this one. However, she was drawn to take a closer look because the cover said that the author is an Iraq war veteran from the United States who wrote the book from the point of view of an Iraqi man (Jordan).

Moreover, Jordan writes, the main reason she was hesitant to review this novel was due to her own bad memories about the time periods when American President Bush started to bomb Baghdad and later when American troops began to be withdrawn from the country. And yet "my eyes kept returning to the captivating cover photo of the beautiful blue-eyed girl who was dressed in *a hijab*, and my mind to the puzzle of why I had been sent the book, but somehow I found myself cracking it the same night" (Jordan). Jordan describes how Buchholz's captivating novel focused her attention so thoroughly on the story to the extent that she spent hours absorbing the story, and eventually she had to admit that she had changed her mind about the book (Jordan).

The novel was surprising for Hillary Jordan in many respects, especially since the main character is a fictitious middle-aged native of war-ravaged Iraq, while the author is an American veteran of the Iraq war. Even the name of the main character is ironic. In fact, the story does not come out as if it had been narrated by the author, but rather as if it had been the experiences that are remembered by Abu-Saheeh. He had come to the small southern Iraqi town to start over in life somehow, which is reflective of a person who was extremely conflicted and had a desire to change his life, though he realizes that circumstances may prevent that turnaround: "Any stability I might find here is only temporary, only a clever disguise I must now assume." (Buchholz 167). He had been a shopkeeper; he was also a veteran of the war who had been watching American troops passing on the highway connecting Basra and Kuwait. The use of first person gives the reader the ability to have a one-on-one relationship while going through the novel (Jordan).

Hillary Jordan notices that Abu's fresh start gets broken by the sudden appearance of Layla at the shop, a teenaged street urchin who had fascinations of several ideologies regarding the United States of America. Abu becomes addicted to the frequent visits of the teenager with the thought that one day she will materialize from thin air and get to share her own ideas, all of which are regarded to be forbidden as she was a girl who was of a marriageable age in a private conversation with an older man who was also unmarried. This was a reflection of the staunch preservation of Iraqi culture. The people of such a society are more than ready to make sure that they preserve their culture inasmuch as they had been in the hands of the United States for quite some time. The other charms are well hidden in such an extravagant set piece of a novel; the author

makes sure that he uses the best reflections that would call attention to the novel as such. The main reason behind this is to attract the attention of the readers, so that they understand more of the world of the novel each time they read it (Jordan).

The novel plays a key role in the understanding of the post-occupation suffering that other countries endure after they come out from the hands of the United States. Jordan says that there is a great need for people to read works such as this novel, because this story portrays some of the harsh realities of life. Stories like Buchholz's novel reflect how culture could be misinterpreted by people, and how people suffer in their homeland, yet later decide to run away from their problems to only be reminded of these same problems by a people they wish to forget about but are who still present in their lives to remind them of the same initial problems. She states, "We need to be forced out of our tidy assumptions, which are shaped and packaged by the American media and reinforced by our ignorance and fear of other cultures." She feels the necessity to question American society, on both a personal and political level, as to why Americans have chosen to send some of its citizens to harm citizens of other nations such as Iraq (Jordan).

Furthermore, Jordan says that there is a need for people to walk in the shoes of others unlike themselves in order for the people to find their own humanity. This is a novel that not only provides a feast for those that love beautiful sentences and breathing characters; it is also a page-turner that will educate a man about the beautiful sentences that are in the novel plus the beauty in character traits that have been showcased (Jordan).

Jordan continues in her praise of the novel: while she was halfway through the novel, she felt certainty as to why Buchholz's agent had sent the book to her. It became clear that Buchholz's novel had the same ideology that she had set out in *Mudbound*,

where the novel was out to address the important elements of life that are too unsettling to think about. The reviewer also discusses how war can lead to grievous effects in relationships between people (Jordan).

Another American author and journalist, Masha Hamilton, wrote in her *Washington Post* review about how Buchholz's work is amazing to the point that any reader will engage in the novel as soon as they begin reading the book. She admits that the novel is a strong piece of writing that shows the author's intelligence and eloquence in providing all the details. She also refers to the novel as a unique piece of writing: "this novel carries a strong sense of place and time that comes from personal familiarity" (Hamilton). Moreover, she praises Buchholz for his well-crafted depiction of the life of ordinary Iraqi people and for his drawing the reader to the sorrow and suffering that has involved the country in recent history (Hamilton).

Furthermore, she was very surprised at how Buchholz illustrates the reality of the war and depicts the war through his wide imagination: "Iraq war veteran Benjamin Buchholz has written a seductive, compelling first novel that depicts war as intimate and subtle." As a reviewer, she lauds Buchholz for the level of detail in his descriptions: "Buchholz captures the distant rumbling of a Humvee, the dappled shadow left by a passing soldier and the ordinary dramas of sibling rivalry and unrequited love" (Hamilton).

She also explains how Buchholz is able to propose the idea of war in a perfect way from his own first-hand experience that enables him to write and give definition to the meaning of the war: "War is no more or less meaningful than those details, but it increases the stakes, Buchholz proposes" (Hamilton). She also alludes to the point that

the United States' efforts against jihad is an oversimplification, since jihadists are creating more insurgencies in countries besides Iraq. The war is not something easy but it is about women and children and men who endure suffering by being in a warzone: "War is not big speeches and credos. It is man and woman and woman and child, oblivious to everything except the basics of joy and hunger and thirst and inquiry" (Hamilton).

Additionally, she also points out how the plot develops in intensity, how the pressure intensifies more and more on the personality of Abu Saheeh—because an American soldier wants to adopt Layla, because of the death of his friend (who is also his powerful patron), and because of his past memories. The first two factors and his past memories twist his perception of reality to the point that he can no longer differentiate between the present and past, and his struggles with reality parallel the war itself. Abu Saheeh's perception becomes vague and blurred, which would cause heartbreak to anyone. Furthermore, she points out that the personality of Abu Saheeh is very complex, especially because of his complicated history: he tries to drown within himself at night through drinking—while in the morning, Layla stands as a symbol for him to relive his past by her ability to fascinate him with her stories (Hamilton).

Zoe Ferraris, author of *City of Veils*, states, "*One Hundred and One Nights* blows down the highway with the furious momentum of an army convoy while delivering its real prize: a heart-wrenching story of love and loss and redemption." Despite the brevity of this description, it captures the heart of the novel in its ability to seize the reader's interest and deliver its powerful message. In addition, Ferraris points out that the novel always refers to the political issues in order to remind the reader that Abu Saheeh has a

role in the town's politics as an educated doctor whose struggles with his inner mind are only gradually revealed in the novel (Ferraris).

Another reader from Goodreads.com explains how she had found a reference to this novel while reading a local newspaper, and she immediately wanted to read it (Caswell). The novel seems to be nothing more than an expression of the proper quality of writing, on its surface. It is indicated how Abu Saheeh has a daily routine, and this routine is interrupted each time by Layla; however, deep in the story there is a better understanding of his routine and also of his reasons for being under such immense pressure. The story is made up of several life twists that surround Abu Saheeh's life. The complexity of the character is in relation to the situation of the society; thus readers' attention increases, and so does their appetite, as Abu's story unfolds. She describes how this novel has a balanced use of flashbacks to show gradually how Abu has changed so much, but also to reveal how the people of Iraq have changed. This is the main reason first person narrative was used in the novel: to make sure that the memories are well brought out and are also more digestible (Caswell).

Caswell discusses that this novel shows how someone's past can easily affect his future; Buchholz writes masterfully, so that the audience can be part of the novel physically through our participation in an illusion. This shows the brilliant talent that Buchholz has in store for his readers, she points out, and the moments are well described all throughout the novel, so one can easily feel physically present in different scenes. She also tries to speak about how war usually spoils the relationship between nations: "It is war that causes people to hate the other nation and as a result the citizens are the victims of such issues" (Caswell). Though the war was expected to cause chaos and poor

relationships between the two countries, Abu-Saheeh, who had also been a soldier in a previous war, seeks refuge from his dark past in the same place he had left previously with the aim of spreading peace to the people of Iraq (Caswell).

Furthermore, the novel is a fiction that combines the eye-level view of the war that took place in Iraq with a story that rotates around the lost relationships that were caused by the war (“*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”). This *Kirkus Review* anonymous reviewer argues that the novel tries to produce the significant effects that are always felt during war and after war—how society’s perception about a specific country usually changes after any war; and how wars always create a grievous effect on the society, including loss of family routine—in the name of one country having invaded the other, for whichever reason it may deem to provide. According to the *Kirkus Review*, “Abu Saheeh is an example of people who have left their countries to go search for happiness elsewhere and it is not clear whether they get what they wanted or not” (“*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”). They cause harm to the same society and then still get to go back there with the intention to keep their past behind them (“*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”).

This reviewer also focuses on how Layla acts as a memory haunter to Abu by reminding him of certain facts that had taken place in his life. This shows that, indeed, it was not so easy for him to get away from his past as he had hoped to do. The author has been described as an astute observer who is able to turn around and reflect on the kind of society that has suffered at the hands of another country but is still in the rebuilding process; as Buchholz shows, this society is very bitter towards that country that could

claim to have helped them solve their problems. After all, they had not asked for such assistance (*“One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”).

This book is able to create a strong emotional attachment in the reader by reflecting how other societies could be suffering while the mother of the problem is enjoying its freedom on the other end: “Such an uneven story that has the ring of authenticity makes it so difficult for a reader to follow; inasmuch as this takes place, one thing that can be attested is that the story is all interesting still in the long run” (*“One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”). This is among the few American novels that exist about Iraqi society and give a clear reflection of what has happened in the past. From the novel one can easily infer that moving to any place in hope of changing one’s life after such horror is not so easy for any member of such a society (*“One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”).

One Hundred and One Nights conveys the story not only of war and individual relationships but of traditional culture, beliefs, and how women are often victims who sacrifice their lives in war. A reader on Amazon.com who calls herself “Noelle the Dreamer” writes, “The continuity described in the beginning of each chapter tells us something of the human stamina in surviving oppressed regimes and invasions of one’s country. It is survival of the fittest and we have seen enough photos to let us imagine if only for a moment what it does to man, woman and child” (Noelle the Dreamer). Additionally, the book describes every detail of events that happened and haunted Safwan city. Patty, another reader at Goodreads.com, argues, “War, no matter its root cause, does so much damage to individuals, and that damage is the soul of this book.

Good people can be driven to horrific acts by the repeated acts upon them. Unyielding cultural and religious dogma add fuel to a fire. And it is not one sided” (Patty).

Additionally, most reviewers and readers argue that the book is complex because Buchholz presents a variety of complicated topics. He presents war, culture, and women where most readers become intricately engaged in the tragedy of post-war Iraq since it is an experience that Buchholz encountered personally during his participation in operations launched from an Iraqi Air Force Base just south of Safwan City near Kuwait. One can understand why Abu Saheeh is always watching “the American convoys pass around the outskirts of the little town of Safwan, crossing the border between Iraq and Kuwait” (Buchholz 1).

Further, while most reviewers and readers empathize with Iraqi society and its people, they are amazed at the way Buchholz presents Iraqi culture and its people. Buchholz shows the reader the interchange of cultures, the effect of the American invasion of Iraq, the interaction between the conquering forces and the conquered people, and, through the character of Layla, the conservative rules that are imposed on women. Buchholz said, “I appropriated my own feelings about the death of the six-year-old girl and I projected them onto Abu Saheeh as the young girl Layla latched onto him in the market place, infecting his loose grip on the world and threatening to unravel all the work he had done to overcome his sense of dislocation and his hidden, insurmountable grief” (qtd. in Goldberg).

Chapter 6: Post-colonialism and Feminism in *One Hundred and One Nights*

Post-colonialism and feminism in *One Hundred and One Nights* is palpable in the development and characterization of the character Layla. Benjamin Buchholz develops the character Layla to be a pure reflection or a symbol of post-colonialism. The capacity of the character Layla to be a figure of the post-colonialism in Iraq is apparent from the description of her altered culture. The depiction of the young girl convinces the reader to acknowledge that the theme of feminism is founded in her attributes. The fourteen-year-old Layla is a street urchin. The narrator alleges, “But I know of no rules to govern a meeting between a forward little urchin of a girl and an old man like me. Or no rules I wish to follow” (Buchholz 6). Further, the narrator in another passage illustrates, “she seems the very avatar of the Iraqi street urchin I initially thought her to be: gangly, dirty, barefoot, wearing frayed blue jeans and an even dirtier greenish knee-length caftan” (Buchholz 23). This description was ascribed to the fact that the narrator was not aware of any family of the fourteen-year-old adolescent. The claim by the narrator is further substantiated by the author’s not mentioning any detailed information concerning the family or the parents of Layla. Furthermore, Abu Saheeh is not aware of her parents.

In addition, Layla is a symbol of post-colonialism, which can be seen through the narrator’s description of her love for American pop culture, especially American music and films where she is explicit about her love of Britney Spears and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Moreover, the yarn-adorned dollhouse keys and bird bones that the girl wore around her left ankle allude to her desire to display her beauty when modesty is the norm. The claim is observable in the book when Layla explains to the narrator, “I watch TV, and I talk to the soldiers sometimes, and my favorite is Arnold Schwarzenegger”

(Buchholz 7). Benjamin Graves further explained Bhabha's quote in his article by saying, "the negotiation of culture identity involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural performance that in turn produce a mutual and mutable recognition or (representation) of cultural differences" (qtd. in Graves). Layla is completely aware of the culture differences. Not only does she represent the American values, but also through her feelings and in the manner she speaks about the United States, she reveals to the reader her perception about the United States. She perceives the United States to be a better country as compared to Iraq. According to Bhabha, "The categories of 'East' and 'West' or 'the colonized' and 'the colonizer' are not inseparable monoliths. Rather both the colonized and colonizer are changed and transfer during the colonial interaction" (qtd. in Bashkin 3). This indicates that the personality of Layla is affected by American culture during the invasion of Iraq and that culture can be changed and transferred as a result of interaction. Indeed, Catherine Manathunga states, "because our world has been profoundly shaped by colonialism and neocolonialism in so many forms, our own personal positioning in relation to colonialism has an impact on our personal and professional way of thinking (368).

Furthermore, Layla's appreciation of the American culture is ironic to the reader because the invasion of Iraq by the American forces resulted in many atrocities in the country. Likewise, the reader is aware that most of the American cultural values were considered "haram" or illegal in Iraqi culture. In the instance of feminism, the young girl is fashioned to be a victim of Iraqi society manipulation that was fundamentally measured to be male-identified or epitomized by gender hierarchy. In the novel, the reader can comprehend the patriarchal society of Iraq: "She is older than ten. Maybe

twelve, maybe even thirteen or fourteen.... Too old to run wild. Nearly ready for the hijab. Nearly ready for marriage” (Buchholz 21). The passage indicates that the social construct of Iraqi society is different and that girls or women of this age could be considered for marriage. The reader is made to comprehend that, in Iraqi culture, it was acceptable for a fourteen-year-old girl to be married away. This is evident in this passage when Abu talks about Iraqi schoolgirls: “A group of schoolgirls in black uniforms passes my shop The eldest cover their heads—some cover even their faces—with plain, modest scarves. . . . [H]ere in the south, where the old traditions prevail, girls of such age are considered old enough to marry. I avoid looking at them directly” (Buchholz 73). This practice was contrary to the expectations of a modern and liberal society, such as the American society, where the reader expects a fourteen-year-old girl to be a teenager and not ready for marriage. Furthermore, since the narrator considered fourteen-year-old girls as mature, they should wear scarves to preserve their family honor: “Just a frail, bird-boned fourteen-year-old? Her mother should be ashamed, letting her out of the house at such an age and dressed in nothing more than rags! Rags, when she should be veiled to preserve her family’s honor!” (Buchholz 22).

Additionally, another instance where feminism is evident through the young girl’s character is the fact that she is not in school but spending time visiting the old, mature, unmarried man. The instance is apparent in the book when the narrator claims, “Layla visits in the evening, again this evening, as is becoming quite usual” (Buchholz 27). The claim highlights the frequency of the girl’s visiting Abu Saheeh at the expense of her schooling. The young girl’s absence from school merely confirms the fears of the reader that the current form of Iraqi society has lost the value of any form of education for

women in comparison to men. It is observable in the book that society valued the education of men, where they were even supported to travel to other countries for education. A convincing example is the character Abu Saheeh himself, an American-educated doctor. According to Dreibelbis, the author compels the reader to comprehend that, whereas Abu Saheeh had travelled to Chicago to train as a physician, Layla was not even given basic elementary education (1). It is conclusive to the reader that through the character Layla, a feminist critique of patriarchy is apparent, since Iraqi society empowers men regarding education while demeaning women through denying them education. According to Safaa Bahjat, “In Iraq young girls are less likely to enter the school system—interlocking gender inequalities associated with culture practices and attitudes to girls’ education create barriers to entry and progression through school and reduce expectations and ambition among many girls” (36).

Equally, post-colonialism and feminism are obvious in the novel through the relationships that characterize and define the character Abu Saheeh. Whereas the author used the character Layla to be a manifestation of the national perspective of Iraq’s experience of the erosion of values, loss of identity, and challenges to language and faith, Benjamin Buchholz uses Abu Saheeh’s relationship with Layla to highlight the personal perspective of post-colonialism. This claim is obvious in the following passage: “I am at that moment the regenerating man who can no longer think, speak, or reason, without his ghosts surrounding him” (Buchholz 166). Said, Judt, and Said argue that the personal perspective of post-colonialism manifests in the form of a person’s being unable to protect or support self or family, experiencing self-doubts and self-dehumanization (26). According to Bonnie Moradi, dehumanization is defined as the capacity of creating

hierarchy in human needs such as relationships, where some persons are presumed more human as compared to others. As a result, self-dehumanization is a belief of oneself as being less of a human being or an inferior human being (Moradi168).

The character Abu Saheeh is a representation of post-colonialism on the personal level in two perspectives of self-doubt and self-dehumanization in relationships. The case of self-doubt is evident in the character Abu Saheeh, when he opts to move to Safwan to rebuild his life. The narrator affirms, “Also the twenty-second day of business for me since I moved to Safwan. A good day” (Buchholz 28). However, while Abu Saheeh opted to settle in a town that is unfamiliar, Safwan, to have freedom and forget his past, he is being pulled in a destructive direction by Seyyed Abdullah: “I have long expected such a shipment, but now that I am receiving it I’m not sure I want it after all. I’m not sure I want it near me” (Buchholz 166). Additionally, the effects of the American invasion of Iraq have eroded the capacity of the narrator to adapt readily to the new life, but he wishes to return to a normal life despite his allegiance. Moreover, the new relationship with Layla, a young girl in love with American values and culture, instigates more doubt into Abu Saheeh on his ability to reinvent his life.

Another side of Abu Saheeh’s personality that highlights the issue of post-colonialism in the Iraqi society is apparent in the character’s general interaction with the society. The realization of the conditions on the ground in Iraq made the narrator not only to self-dehumanize through the relationship with the people but also to doubt the information that the newspaper presented to the world. This claim is evident when the narrator thinks, “‘War really isn’t news,’ I say. ‘Nothing is news. Nothing is rhinoceros big and quicksandy and compelling, as the newspapers will have you believe’” (Buchholz

219). The case of self-dehumanization is evident in the narrator despite the narrator's having gone to the United States to train as a physician or doctor to help war victims. The deaths and atrocities experienced by the narrator compel him to lose his sense of believing he is a human entitled to universal human rights: "None of them knows that I am dead, more than half dead. None of them guesses that I struggle, part of me numb, part of me awakening in the embrace of a new family, awakening to a simple life, here in the south, here as a man of business. And the dead and half alive of me fight" (Buchholz 167).

Subsequently, the author uses the relationships of characters to depict the issue of feminism in the book. The Iraqi society is portrayed as not only abusive to the rights of women but also comfortable with the idea of women's being denied their fundamental rights, such as education. Moreover, women are perceived to be mere objects or companions for a night that are attracted to the education and wealthy status of men. This is evident in the book in a conversation between Bashar and the narrator. Bashar asserts, "Perhaps you need a companion tonight. I know any number of widows in town. So many widows now. Many have been eyeing you from afar— an eligible, educated man like you makes quite a catch" (Buchholz 15). The statement acknowledges the erosion to the conservative values that the Iraqi society had maintained on lawful relationships.

Consequently, post-colonialism and feminism are evident in Buchholz's depictions of the eroded traditions of post-colonial Iraq. Dreibelbis alleges that the aftermath of post-colonialism is evident from the influence that it has on the traditions of a colonized country. Traditions can be defined to be lengthy-established and developed beliefs and customs that have been passed from one generation of people to another generation (1). In *One Hundred and One Nights*, the author presents the erosion of the

customs and beliefs of the Iraqi people by the invasion of the American military. As a result, the customs and the beliefs loosen, permitting the people of Iraq to imitate American traditions. Nicholas Dirks states that “cultural forms in newly classified ‘traditional’ societies were reconstructed and transformed by and through colonial technologies of conquest rule, which created new categories and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East, even male and female” (3). A compelling instance is evident through the characters of Abu Saheeh and Layla. Abu Saheeh drinks alcohol, which was illegal, and, more importantly, alcohol is now widely smuggled into the country through easy corruption of border officials. Abu Saheeh comfortably drinks the alcohol despite understanding that the customs and beliefs of their culture did not permit him to drink it. Also, the alcohol that the narrator drinks is brought in from the United States, which confirms the influential effect of post-colonialism. The occasion is noticeable when the narrator alleges, “Alcohol is forbidden, yes, but for a bit of baksheesh [bribe] the border becomes permeable. And that baksheesh, at regular intervals, numbs the border official’s mind” (Buchholz 166).

The character Layla dresses and imitates the traditions and beliefs of the American people and culture because she believes that American culture is superior and more enticing as compared to Iraqi culture. Equally, the author uses Iraqi traditions in comparison to American traditions to highlight the issue of feminism in the novel. The beliefs and customs of Iraq are presented to be conservative and demeaning to women, where a man is permitted to marry more than one wife; as a result, women are reduced to mere property and objects of sex. The instance of polygamy is evident when the narrator

avows, “He has taken a third wife recently and he dotes upon her, making it generally known in town that the pick of new jewelry smuggled from Kuwait should be hers; likewise, the pick of perfumes and of flowers harvested by children from the banks of the Shatt al-Arab canal near Umm Qasr” (Buchholz 96-97). The assertion merely confirms that women were presumed to be objects that were submissive to the desires and whims of men. Here, wives are like toys: they are favored when they are new, and the old ones are not even mentioned.

In addition, the customs and beliefs of the Iraqi people dehumanized women as compared to their male counterparts. The men enjoyed rights that were fundamentally denied to women. For instance, the men were permitted to choose women they desired to marry, whereas the women were not given this privilege, as is shown in the passage when Bashar alludes to Abu Saheeh’s marrying Layla: “Of course, you could simply marry her, if you’re so concerned about this market girl—we are in the countryside now. Things are different here. No one will find fault with you for marrying a girl her age” (Buchholz 243).

The issue of post-colonialism and feminism is evident through the effects of the American invasion of Iraq. The theory of cultural hybridity was presented by Homi Bhabha, who argued that hybridity is palpable from diverse forms of colonization. The various forms of colonization result in cultural interchanges and collisions, which lead to many people’s being reflections of manifestations of the two cultures that collided (44). In the novel *One Hundred and One Nights*, the author highlights both post-colonialism and feminism based on adverse effects of the cultural hybridity. The first adverse effect is that the people of Iraq feel their culture and traditions are inferior to the American

culture, which is displayed in the fact that Layla prefers American music, films, robots, and clothes to anything Iraqi: the narrator asserts, “This is too crazy even for a girl whose universe includes robots and unicycles and Arnold Schwarzenegger” (Buchholz 155).

This passage from the novel displays the character of Layla and shows that Buchholz has employed the concept of cultural blending or a hybrid culture, which help to define post-colonial culture and its effects on the people of Iraq. Moreover, according to Childs and Williams, post-colonialism is a period defined by the aftermath of the colonization when a culture is affected by the imperial process from the instant of colonization to the present or modern day (3). Post-colonialism is evident from the effects that the colonial masters had on the culture of the people under their rule.

Masha Hamilton asserts that the invasion of Iraq by the American military resulted in the infiltration of the American culture into Iraq (1). The American culture was defined to be liberal, whereas the Iraqi culture was conservative and predominantly a patriarchal society. The resultant effects were hybrid generations that were made up of characters such as Layla, who struggled in adapting to both the American and Iraqi cultures. The second effect that highlights the presence of post-colonialism is the fight to adjust to the new culture. In most instances post-colonialism manifests itself through the natives trying to adapt to what they deem beneficial. Hillary Jordan, an American author, affirms that the struggle was evident in the character of Layla in the form of her dressing where she incorporated American ornaments to her traditional Islamic regalia. Homi Bhabha explains: “the constant fusion and mutual synthesis between the cultures of the colonizer and colonized creates an ambivalent space in which a symmetric differentiation

between the colonizer and colonized and their representations ‘self’ and ‘other’ become impossible to maintain” (qtd. in Bashkin 3).

In the instance of feminism, the effects of the American invasion are evident through the following. First, the invasion by the Americans highlights the absurd customs and beliefs that typify the treatment of Iraqi women. For instance, it is observable that the traditions of the country permit the men to love and marry teenage girls who are as young as fourteen years old. The perception is evident in the book when the narrator describes Layla as a beautiful woman and imagines he loves her. The narrator states, “I should say, ‘I love you,’ but the closest I come to those words is to repeat myself, to say again, ‘We never should have returned’” (Buchholz 156).

Second, the American invasion highlights the issue of feminism through the struggle of the female characters in trying to adapt to both the American and Iraqi culture, notably through Layla’s struggle in her quest to be a reflection of the American popular culture in spite of being an Iraqi girl. The character aspires to relocate to America because she believes she will have the freedom to listen to the American music as well as dress similarly to American culture (“*One Hundred and One Nights* by Benjamin Buchholz”). This example confirms the victimization of women in Iraqi culture where they could not freely wear American clothing or listen to American music, and yet to embrace such a freedom, she must repudiate her cultural identity.

The concerns of post-colonialism and feminism are major subjects that the author Benjamin Buchholz addresses in the masterpiece, *One Hundred and One Nights*. The issue is developed by the author through characterization of the two primary characters, Abu Saheeh and Layla. Through the interactions of the two characters, the reader readily

comprehends the issues. The author ensures that the concerns of post-colonialism and feminism are manifested in the daily interactions among the people in Iraq and through comparison of the cultures of the two countries.

Future of Iraqi Women and Literature

Benjamin Buchholz provided a novel that displays how the Iraqi people have survived through a war that was defined as a liberation operation but became an invasion and occupation. In addition, it also displays to the reader how war affects the culture of other people as a result of colonization, which leads to culture collision or culture interchanges. In his novel, Buchholz considers culture as an important theme, and he explores how “American culture continues to influence the Middle East, how it affects the traditional lives of people there, sometimes producing moments of beauty, and sometimes producing moments of confrontation or even calamity” (“Reading Group Guide” 6). Indeed, Buchholz paints a vivid picture of the culture of Iraq and its conservative society in 2003 and shows how the conservative society and women have been changed and affected by an outside culture as a result of colonialization.

Furthermore, Buchholz delivers a word-photo of the status of Middle Eastern women during the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, showing also how women have struggled since that invasion. Iraqi women have experienced very hard lives as a result of the violence and chaos of the war. One can notice in the novel his portrayal of the personality of a young female in a society that is on the verge of collapse as a result of war and violence. He also shows the difficulties of life for Iraqi women because of other

societal issues, such as cultural restrictions on their freedom or oppressive views of their nature.

Additionally, Buchholz's novel allows us the opportunity to talk about Iraqi women. Women have long struggled for their rights in the Middle Eastern world and have many times experienced the effects of war, conflict, and oppression. However, most Iraqi women have nevertheless expressed their creativity and have become an important part in the workforce of the society since the conflicts with Iran and since the first Gulf War. Despite the obstacles faced in life and despite suffering from both society and three wars, Iraqi women are still defying and facing the hardest situations of life with dignity and courage. Not only are they demanding their equal rights, but they are also standing against oppression and corruption in the society. In Iraq, from 2008 until now, there has been great change in the status of females in society. Women have been greater contributors to the development of society and, at the same time, have carried out tasks traditionally given to men. Indeed, most professional women not only are helping to support their families but are providing most of the money needed in order to survive. Further, after several years of invasion, the status of women has changed in a noticeable way and, as a result of technology, one can notice the community has changed and has become slightly more open towards women, even though there are still some limitations imposed on women from Islamic Law. Indeed, women find ways to develop themselves in society. More women are turning their attention to education and to improving their level of knowledge in the workplace in order to create changes in Iraqi society. In fact, nowadays Iraqi women have a very active role in the society, even though their rights are not yet fully achieved.

The educational system on all levels is considered the most important tool for women in their ongoing struggle for equality and participation in public life. In the current culture, education for Iraqi women is the main means to fight poverty and to lead them to better positions in life and work, since education is free at all levels in Iraq. Unfortunately, because of war, people in education have been under attack, and this has led to the loss of many academics in Iraq. According to UNESCO, “in Iraq, 71 academics, two education officials and 37 students were killed in assassinations and targeted bombings between 2007 and 2009” (22). Most colleges are in need of academic people who have different specializations; for this reason, the Iraqi government now sends people, even women, abroad to study, in order to utilize them upon their return to Iraq. The Higher Committee for Education Development in Iraq was founded by Noor Al-Maliki (former prime minister) recently, with the aim to send as many males and females abroad in order to increase the percentage of educated people in Iraq. Through this scholarship, women will find more and more chances to develop themselves and, in addition, returning students will bring changes to the culture and the society of Iraq due to their experiences in examining other cultures.

With the increased opportunity to study abroad and understand other cultures, women will be able to generate, build, change, and make developments to Iraqi society. Therefore, most educated women will have more advantages of freedom and make their own choices regarding their lives, even though women are still facing challenges in the conservative society. For instance, in the more conservative communities in southern Iraq, such as Najaf, women in public should cover themselves completely in a head-to-toe black garment. Yet, despite this limitation, women have made great progress working

outside the home. Even though life is difficult for Iraqi women, the majority seem to be able to manage their lives in order to survive and continue flourishing in the society.

Furthermore, after the invasion, women have found a place to participate in political issues. Under Iraq's new constitution, a quarter of the seats in Parliament should belong to women. Even though they remain a minority in Parliament, the society now considers women important as individuals who may be able to make some positive changes to Iraqi society. Through their involvement in politics, women will be able to continue fighting for the rights of the oppressed in Iraq. In addition, some Iraqi women are not afraid to stand up for their rights. They know what they want, and they are willing to risk their lives for freedom for others.

As self-proclaiming liberties, such societies need to listen to the voices of the brave women who are willing to speak. Only then will those with the ability to help know how to help those who are living in silence.

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